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Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta

What Will Come Out of Iceland

President Reagan's hard-line critics have been fogging the air over Washington with dire predictions of a sellout in Reykjavik this weekend. But White House policy papers show the president has pursued steadfastly the Soviet policy he laid out at the start of his administration: deal from strength, but be reasonable, not provocative.

To the hard shells, Reagan's trillion-dollar defense buildup was supposed to put the United States in a position to shove the Soviets around—to outbully the bully. To Reagan, who wisely recognized that presidents can't afford the luxury of schoolyard histrionics, rearmament was simply the necessary prerequisite to negotiation from strength.

"Nothing destabilizes the international system more than a superpower that has lost its way in the world," a confidential White House guideline points out, adding: "Hence, nothing would contribute more to international stability . . . than the United States' recovering its confidence, leadership and margin of safety in world affairs."

The policy papers also show that Reagan believes Americans "are tired of suffering insults at the hands of other nations," that the president must "stand up for America even if the rest of the world doesn't approve" and that "minimal risks" can be taken to restore the United States "to a position of leadership in the world."

The president doesn't believe it is necessary to match the Soviets weapon for weapon. "Static indicators comparing U.S. and Soviet forces are inadequate measures of strategic power," the papers note.

The policy papers explain why the White House clamped a news blackout on Reykjavik. "The press will remain allies of the Democratic Party," a White House memo declares bluntly. "Its anti-administration cant will not stop."

The people around the president don't trust the Washington press corps. "We should accept the fact that the Washington media are what they are," states the memo. "Their interpretational program is never going to be supportive no matter how hard we try to woo them."

The memo states: "The most unreliable and ineffective communication vehicle for us or any president to use is the press conference." The president, therefore, will try to go over the heads of the White House press corps and appeal to "the non-Washington-based media."

The shades are thus drawn on the Reykjavik negotiations. Afterward, the president will try to circumvent the press and deliver his report on the negotiations as directly as possible to the public.

Meanwhile, the accompanying reporters are learning more than they probably want to know about Iceland. It has no army and a 300-person unarmed police force. The only military unit it possesses is a 20-man counter-terrorist platoon.

In short the one thing Iceland contributes to the NATO alliance is its strategic location. It provides air and naval bases for U.S. and other allied forces keeping their surveillance over the vital sea lanes of the North Atlantic, which Soviet submarines must transit on their way to and from their Arctic bases.

What if Iceland decided to pull out of NATO, as a result of threats or beguilement from the Kremlin? The CIA happens to have produced a Top Secret report on "the consequences if Iceland pulls out of NATO." Here's what it says:

"The military significance of an Icelandic withdrawal would depend on what happened to the Keflavik [air] base. . . .

"If Iceland decided to close down Keflavik, NATO would lose strategically located surveillance, communications and navigation facilities. These facilities could be relocated, perhaps to the [British] Shetland or [Danish] Faeroe Islands, but the cost would be high, and some coverage would be lost while facilities were being transferred.

"No new site could be as advantageously located, and NATO might suffer some permanent loss in defense capabilities.

"Without U.S. or NATO presence, Iceland would become vulnerable to Soviet pressure. Moscow would be tempted to try filling the vacuum. . . .

"Although Soviet military intervention is unlikely, careful nurturing of a pro-Soviet climate in Iceland could conceivably persuade Reykjavik later on to grant the U.S.S.R. naval and air support facilities."

Soviet designs on Iceland are a more legitimate worry than the unreasonable fear that Ronald Reagan will sell out his country this weekend.

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